Camberwell College of Arts  
MA Visual Art: Fine Art (Digital)

Project proposal  
Version 2: 14th November 2017

1. Title: At the margins; an intermedial exploration of liminality

2. Summary and Aims

This project is concerned with how intermedial artworks can be used to engage with the cultural concept of the liminal. My approach will be informed by a theoretical approach to intermedia developed in my research paper (Farley, 2017) and also by my previous work on experimental systems in the studio. Theory and practice will be developed and integrated with fieldwork to form a framework for a trans-disciplinary exploration of the liminal in a series of installation artworks.

3. Objectives

• To undertake research and fieldwork investigating the liminal

• To put intermedial theory into practice and to explore liminality in a series of case studies

• To develop an open ended experimental systems approach building on Unit 1

• To integrate case studies, experimental systems and fieldwork to develop a toolbox of techniques, material and structures to be deployed for installation

• To make smaller scale artwork that explores the liminal

• To make a large scale installation for the final show that explores the liminal

4. Context (history, contemporary, theoretical)

Intermedia

The concept of the medium in the visual arts has become difficult to define in a complex, mediated society dominated by digital technology. Historically, the idea that each art form by virtue of its medium has its own exclusive qualities and path of development dates back to the 18th century, but by the mid-1960's modernist concepts of medial unity had begun to falter leading to a broader notion of art and an increased interest in intermedial art forms. Dick Higgins and Hans Breder (2005)
changed the terms of the debate by promoting intermedia as a means of abolishing the schism between art and life. I explored these ideas further in the first year of the MA, rethinking my ideas around the concept of the artistic medium and the use of technology. Rosalind Krauss' writing on the post-medium condition, especially her essay 'A Voyage on the North Sea' (Krauss, 1999) was a catalyst. This reading was subsequently focused on my research paper which looked at the broader debate around intermediality in the context of the contemporary art and broader media theory.

The outcome of this research is an approach to media that could be termed ontological intermediality, i.e;

'...the definition of the specific character of a medium requires the differential demarcation from other media; therefore the terms for other media are absolutely necessary for every purist and essentialist definition...thus it is intermediality that is primal and the clearly separated mono-media are the result of purposeful blockades, incisions and mechanisms of exclusion.' (Schröter, 2011).

In the context of contemporary art, this implies that a critically minded artist may need to consider their position within this media space. I then went on to explore how they might do this, both at a strategic and more philosophical level. While reading around the concepts of the trace I came across Giorgio Agamben's writing on gesture (2008) and Jill Bennett's application of Agamben to an exploration of the aesthetics of intermediality (2007). Together these approaches offered an approach that could integrate a broader media philosophical outlook with the specific concerns of contemporary art. I then when on to develop two key aspects of a collective concept which I termed the intermedial gesture. While distinct, they are often found intertwined in a given artwork in a kind of dialectical relationship. The first aspect relates to the way in which we (as viewer or artist) are an embedded and integral part of the media environment, both changing and being changed by it. This plays out in art works where the observer is made aware of their own and/or the artist's mediality in subtle and indirect ways. The second aspect occurs where there is a form of staging or exhibition of intermedial relationships. The artist in this case steps back and the emphasis is placed on the experience of transition or in-between-ness (Farley, 2017).

The intermedial gesture was then explored in the work of 6 artists, from the 16mm films of Marcel Broodthaers to the complex digital installations of David Claerbout. In order to guide my own work in this intermedial space I needed a thematic that could focus my artistic research process and also exploit the potential of the intermedial approach that I had developed. I decided to use the broad concept of the liminal for this purpose as it seemed ideally suited to both my personal interests and to an exploration via intermedia.

The liminal

Boundaries in culture can be conceptualised through liminality. For example a liminal place is situated in between two or more distinct spaces but cannot be identified with
either of them. Liminality can also be viewed also from the temporal perspective, in which time is not controlled by the clock, it is a time of enchantment or suspension when anything might happen. A liminal zone may be a literal place with more or less distinguishable borders, but it may be an imaginary in-between place that unites different social statuses in the form of rituals. From the anthropological viewpoint, liminality means 'being-on-a-threshold', it is 'a state which is between the normal, day to day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status' (Turner, 1969, Andrews and Roberts, 2017). Liminality as a social phenomenon is rich in examples and the many ways in which someone may be considered to belong to cultural 'borderlines' emphasises the importance of the distinction between centre and periphery of social space' (Andrews and Roberts, 2017).

I will now review how intermedia and the liminal can be bought together within an artistic research framework.

**Intermedia and liminality**

Hans Breder was a pioneer of intermedia who set up an influential intermedia program at the University of Iowa. Breder tended to equate intermedia with liminality in a broad sense (see for example, *Intermedia: enacting the liminal*, Breder and Busse, 2005) in the sense that liminality seems to result more or less *directly* from the combination of media. My approach is different and is informed by contemporary media and artistic research approaches. I see intermediality as an appropriate vehicle to explore liminality as a starting point, but intermedial relationships may not necessarily create a liminal experience nor would they always attempt to do so. Instead the intermedial gesture is more like a tool within a broader artistic research activity into liminality that may extend across disciplines such as anthropology, cultural geography, performance and medical science. This approach is intrinsically trans-disciplinary using a method outlined by Bennett (2007) in her paper on intermedial aesthetics.

Thus I see liminality as a complex phenomenon requiring an in-depth study appropriate to the context that may demand different approaches and intermedial strategies in the production of artworks. In the next section I will discuss the artistic research methods I intend to adopt.

**Artistic research**

My approach to artistic research will be guided by several essays in Schwab (2016) and Dombois (2012), two books that explore artistic research themes across contemporary art and music. As a starting point, Henk Borgdorff (writing in Dombois, 2012) describes artistic research as 'boundary work', moving along and across the borders between disciplines. This it could be said that *artistic research operates in a liminal zone itself* and I would certainly characterise my own approach...
in that way. Meanwhile, Suzanne Witzgall (writing in Schwab, 2016) discusses the 'phenomeno-technology' of the 'New Materialists' to describe how artists such as Karla Black are using raw materials to highlight the material dimensions of the work of art and our phenomenological engagement with it. This is complemented by work produced in the studio under quasi-experimental conditions (termed 'experimental systems' by H-J Reinberger writing in Schwab, 2016) that adopt or adapt methods in the physical or biological sciences. In all these cases it is important to 'return to the boundary', thus a method adopted from cultural geography could provide field material which is integrated with data from experimental investigations in the studio, for example.

In the methodology section I will look in more detail at how I will research and develop intermedial artworks exploring liminality within this overarching artistic research activity.

5. Methodology

The overall approach will consist of a combination of (i) library/archival research, (ii) fieldwork and (iii) studio work. The studio-work will be focused on case studies with models, projections, screens, sound and light sources that will develop more theoretical or speculative ideas at the intersection of intermedia and liminality, and will also include open ended experimental work (experimental systems) The objective here is to form a kind of toolbox of techniques and material which can be reconfigured for different projects in a flexible way. The studio-work will be complemented by library research and fieldwork to specific sites (such as urban or rural places or the interior of buildings) that are the focus of my research into liminality. The fieldwork will provide information and material (stills, video and sound) that will directly feed into and inform the case studies and final work.

5.1 Main areas of activity - further details

Research and fieldwork into liminality

Research in liminality in cultural geography, anthropology, performance and theatre studies, medical and psychiatric literature and archives.

Field work - visits to sites, including photographic, sound and video recording, interviews, map making, collection of materials. Some of the sound recording may be done with binaural and/or ambisonic microphones for multi-channel sound work.

Liminal case studies

Screen as threshold - design and construction of screens for projections, including 2D/3D textured and sculptural screens, transparent screens, printed fabric and rice paper.
Liminal images - Images in transition; composite projections combinations of two or more projections in space which are designed to create specific effects when bodies move and shadow the projection space. Positive and negative, still/moving, blurred and focused.

Liminal soundscapes - multichannel and 3D sound art, incorporating binaural and ambisonic field recordings. Investigation of loudspeaker systems and housings as sculptural elements, vibration speakers and flat panel speaker systems.

Liminal atmospheres - an integrative investigation of combinations of projections, light, sound and sculptural elements together with fieldwork material. Investigation of computers, arduino, HD players and audio players for light and sound control.

Experimental systems

Not constrained by particular materials or approaches, the emphasis is on small scale novel imaging and materials processes that are explored in an open ended way using quasi-scientific methods. This can generate material for further work or trigger development into case studies and full scale pieces. Also includes model making for experimenting in the studio to plan larger scale work in architectural spaces, installations and atmospheres.

Liminal artwork

Larger scale work is currently conceived broadly in installation format and are likely to include both light and sound elements depending on what approaches are found to be most effective. The case studies are planned in a modular format (toolbox) which can be integrated with other material (field recording etc) in a flexible way to allow artwork to be adapted to some extent to different spaces and situations. However the liminal artworks will likely place the emphasis on immersion, the human scale and actual liminal experience, so there may be some practical limits where and how these works can be installed.

6. Outcomes

Research - literature collection of liminal writing in cultural geography, anthropology, medicine.

Fieldwork resources - stills, video and sound recording, site specific materials

Case studies and experimental systems - a toolbox of (i) lighting and sound technology (ii) materials and constructions that can be assembled and used for projects.

Liminal artworks - 3 or 4 small scale works and the final show presentation.
7. Workplan

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1. Research survey - broad based reading
2. Studio case study - investigating the digital photogram, constructed photography
3. Studio case study - macro dust experiments
4. Interim show
5. Research paper
6. Library and Fieldwork in liminality
7. Case studies and experimental systems
8. Smaller artworks
9. Final show development
10. Final show installation and presentation

8. Bibliography and references


Schröter, J., (2011) Discourses and Models of Intermediality. CLCWeb: Comparative
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